

KARL RAHNER SOCIETY

Topic: Encounters between Rahner and the Religious Other
Convener: Howard Ebert, St. Norbert College
Moderator: Ann Riggs, Rivier College
Panelists: Miguel Diaz, St. John's University, Minnesota
Jerry Farmer, Xavier University, Louisiana

This session continued the examination of Rahner's approach to the religious and cultural "other" which was the focus of the recent book, *Rahner Beyond Rahner: A Great Theologian Encounters the Pacific Rim* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005). Paul Crowley, editor of the volume, began the session with a brief introduction of the context and structure of the conference, "Karl Rahner at the Pacific Rim," held at Santa Clara University in October of 2004. The purpose of the conference was to investigate how the religious and cultural realities of the Pacific Rim both challenge and provide new entrees to the thought and legacy of Rahner's theological approach. He noted that the majority of participants in the conference were drawn from the local region with the exception of keynote speaker, Francis X. Clooney, Parkman Professor of Divinity and professor of comparative theology at Harvard Divinity School. Crowley observed that as discussions developed during the conference numerous problems (e.g., the problematic designation and usage of the term "Pacific Rim") and questions were raised. Finally, he observed that he hoped this session would continue to broaden the issues raised in the conference and book.

The first respondent, Miguel Diaz, noted that the variety of essays contained in the volume makes it difficult to make general observations so he selected to focus his observations on a few critical themes that intersect with the perspective of Latinos/as theologies. In particular, Diaz applauded the emphasis of numerous essays on the incarnational thrust and center of Rahner's theology. This emphasis is grounded in Rahner's appropriation of Ignatian spirituality, a spirituality which sprang out of a Spanish cultural context and resonates powerfully with Latinos/as theology and practice. In addition, Diaz noted that in dealing with religious and cultural otherness, it is useful to situate Rahner's anthropology, not in the perspective of German idealism, but rather in context of his Trinitarian theology. Diaz maintains that it is here that Rahner powerfully addresses the realities of the other and the one and the many. This Rahnerian perspective can enrich and be enriched by Latinos/as theologies which place a strong emphasis on otherness. Finally, Diaz offered a "gentle criticism" of the volume noting that the work would have been improved if voices from diverse cultural and religious contexts were included.

The second respondent, Jerry Farmer, noted that Rahner's thought provides an alternative to the essentialist, hierarchal readings present in many theological systems today. He noted that genuine dialogue requires a conversation between two equal subjects. For Farmer, Rahner's theology provides a foundation for such a

dialogue. He also noted that cultural realities are not homogeneous realities but mixtures, and that these mixtures require careful respectful dialogue. For instance, the reality that there are 15 million Muslims in Europe, undercuts any simplistic demarcations between European and Muslim culture. Rahner's theology with its contention of "offered grace" and accepted grace provides both the motivation and conceptual framework to attend to God working in all cultures and religions.

Numerous observations and questions followed the presentations. One, it was noted that the key question is not how Rahner can be transposed to other cultures but rather how his thoughts and categories (e.g., mystery) can be brought into dialogue with other key beliefs and practices. Two, the notion of "the other" was also discussed yielding such questions as: Who defines the other? Does the language of "other" reflect the need for the center to have an other? Who authorizes Rahner over other theological approaches? How does one permit or facilitate the other to have a voice on one's own terms? How can one structure the dialogue so it is between subject and subject and not between a subject and an "objectified other?" Finally in the postcolonial context, how does Rahner's position help to own both grace and sin?

The Annual Karl Rahner Society Meeting was attended by seventy people. Terrance Klein, a member of the KRS Steering Committee, presided at the meeting. Leo O'Donovan gave a summary of his recent essay in *Theology Today*, entitled "Karl Rahner, SJ (1904–1984): A Theologian for the Twenty-First Century." Andreas Batlogg provided an update on the Rahner's Sämliche Werke being published by Herder. Currently sixteen of the thirty-two volumes are published. Melvin Michalski also presented information about his new book, coedited by Andreas Batlogg, of interviews with individuals who knew Rahner well. Mary Himes reminded members that *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Rahner* was now available. Ann Riggs, editor of *Philosophy and Theology*, informed the group that there had been a delay in printing the recent issues and consequently members have yet not been billed. Ann stated that she and the new editor are committed to catching up this summer. Finally Terry Klein announced the theme for next year's Rahner session was "Church Leadership, Structures and Power: A Rahnerian Vision."

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